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Church of God

WHICH IS AT

NEW HARMONY.

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AN ADDRESS BY

REV. JNO. R. RILEY, D. D.

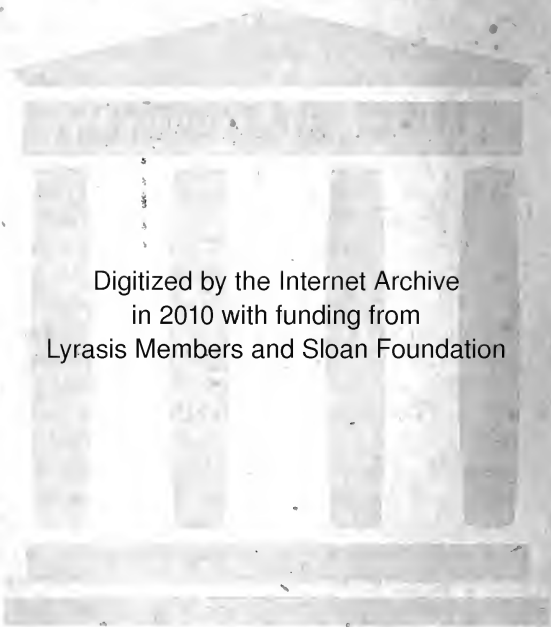
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THE CHURCH OF GOD, WHICH IS AT NEW HARMONY.

This is our theme and it is our text. The occasion of our meeting to day suggests the matter about which, we propose to speak. The occasion is the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of a church or rather the church at a certain place. There is but one true church of God, and that church is everywhere, where Christ dwells in the hearts of believers. Wherever there are those holding these four things, "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father," there is the church of Jesus Christ. The essentials to the constitution of the church are things that pertain to the soul, which God can alone infallibly detect, and these essentials can not be vouched for by outward signs, ceremonies or prescribed ritual nor by the word of mouth. These may be beautiful and the significance may be impressive, but the truth of which they were designed to be the visible exponent may be wanting. In such a case we would have an image of something that does not really exist, we would have a delusive shadow created by artifice, of a substance that cannot be found. The existence of the church is evidenced to human eyes, not by a beautiful edifice, not by tall spires pointing heavenward, nor by well arranged pews, by a skilled choir of musicians, by logical reasoning and eloquence in the pulpit, nor by the observance of forms of worship, but by the Christlike characters of those who profess to be members. Tested by this rule, some that challenge the admiration of the world by the architectural beauty of the church building, by rich

and gorgeous paraphernalia of the ritual service, by the learning and eloquence of the preacher and by the admiring audience of the thousands of fashionable people that crowd the pews every sabbath may have less claim to be called the church of God than the little band of professing christians whose place of worship is a log or frame barn-shaped building in some obscure part of the county, whose existence is barely known or recognised in the neighboring towns. Such a people may have the true marks of the church of God and may enjoy and experience blessedness in God's service, to which those who are highly privileged so far as material splendor and external worldly relations are concerned are comparative strangers. We do not say this in the spirit of depreciation of the material beauty and elegance, which characterize many of our places of worship. We ought to do what we can to contribute to the attractiveness of the Lord's house, provided what we do is consonant with the native spirit of the place where God is to be worshipped in spirit and truth. Whatever is not in unison with this design and does not contribute to the spirituality of the worshipper should be avoided. There is danger that an excess of material splendor and beauty may excite emotions of feeling that tend to praise and magnify man rather than God, but our design in saying what we have is to impress you with the true idea as to what constitutes the church of the only true and living God, that it is not the place, style of building or any external material things or relations, but an organization of believers in Christ who agree to be his disciples, to be taught the truth by him, and to submit to His governments as made known in the word. The definition as given in the thirty nine articles gives us a conception of the church which we think is the truth, it states "the true church is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God

is preached and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things which of necessity are requisite to the same." We suppose the expression "faithful men" in the definition was used in the generic sense, making the word man mean both male and female. We are sure that it was not intended to restrict church membership to men. We are certain that all who are acquainted with the status of church membership will agree with us, that the faithful, living women of the church constitute in the sphere in which God has placed them, the most efficient factor, for good in extending and sustaining the kingdom of Christ on the earth. Though she does not come to the front in some of the departments of the church's work, yet her influence helps to shape the councils and nerve the hands of the greatest and most successful workers of the other sex. Pardon us for this digression. If we ignore the work and influence of Christian women, then we are blind to every thing that is great and good and worth living for in the world. We do not intend discussing on this occasion, any form of church government or advocate the claims of any one denomination, as to having the order and form of ecclesiastic government as taught in the Scriptures, but will confine our conception of the church to the definition already stated,—a congregation of christians, drawing their life from Christ through his word and by his Spirit endeavoring to put themselves by church connection and by such a diligent use of the means of grace, as will strengthen their union with Christ and foster their allegiance to him as head and King in Zion, so one and the same church may exist at a number of places and under a variety of names.

The church at Antioch, where believers were first called Christians, the church in Greece and Rome and Constantinople, and the church in the middle-ages, in Con-

tinental Europe, and in the Northland, and in England and on the American Continent to day—in Africa, in China and Japan, wherever there is a congregation of believers on Christ, hold, to one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, everywhere irrespective of differences in some of their doctrinal views, and modes of worship and forms of administering the sacraments. No matter by what name they are called, whether Baptist, Methodist Episcopalian or Presbyterian—they are but component parts of that mighty host, who are doing better in the greatest cause, that ever enlisted the heart and hand of man, the cause of God and his truth. They are fighting for the prevalence of that which makes men free indeed—the emancipation of human souls, from the slavery and direful thralldom of sin, by a mysterious, providence, whose interpretation belongs to the purposes of Him who never makes a mistake. This world, of ours, so fair and lovely, as it came from the creative hand, was invaded by a fallen rebel, who by his artful, cunning and seductive influence on the head and representative of the human race, dragged down the human family from their high and primitive state of happiness into the mire and filth of sin, and having broken covenant with God, they became rebels against the divine government, the haters, the enemies of God, and consequently all men who came into the world by ordinary generation, were sinners by nature, and exposed to the penalty of transgression, which was spiritual and eternal death. In this lost condition all men everywhere, arrayed themselves under his leadership, against God, and everything that was good. This is the ruin, in which all men by nature are involved because of sin. To all intelligences, angelic and human, when the human family had forfeited the high, holy, and happy estate which was theirs by creation, all seemed to be lost, forever lost. The first disobedience on the part of the first man, who had been

created the head and representative of his race, seemed to doom the human family to irretrievable woe. No way of deliverance seemed possible for the simple reason that man had violated his covenant, with a just and holy God. Death eternal, was the consequence. This was the righteous decree of heaven. Lost forever lost, seemed the inevitable doom, of the noblest part of creation, they who had been honored as Lords of creation with the impress and image of the Creator. Instead of the environment of an Eden, darkness above, despair beneath, around them flame, within them death. Such was the despair that hung a heavy night over fallen humanity that not a single twinkling star of hope could be seen through the thick darkness. But thanks to that unceasing friendship of heaven for earth even when earth was accursed on account of sin, a friend arose for the wrecked and ruined souls of men. It was this friendship, that in the council of eternity devised the scheme of rescuing the fallen children of men, and restoring them to their forfeited state of favor and friendship with God. Jesus Christ the son of God, undertook the work of making the purpose and plan of redemption effectual. To this end, He made his church on earth a militant church, and under his captaincy. The church is constituted an army of Christian Soldiers, fighting for the conquest of the world, in rebellion against God. The warfare has been waging for centuries with varying reverses and victories, but with ever increasing numbers rallying under the banners of the cross, and however dark the future outlook at times may appear, the final victory and triumph of the cause of Christ, will come. How far or near in the future, we cannot tell. The certainty of success, ought to give ever increasing valor to every soldier of the cross, knowing that his zeal and faithfulness in the Master's service will help to hasten the glorious consummation, when the king!

doms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and His Christ.

The church at New Harmony, is a part of the one great Christian army, called the church militant. Bear in mind that it is not the New Harmony, church whose fiftieth anniversary, we celebrate to day, but the church of God at New Harmony. As we have said, we do not speak to day of the New Harmony Presbyterian Church, but of the church of Christ at New Harmony. By the way, your place has a beautiful name. Harmony ought to be the characteristic, of congregations of Christians everywhere. We have wondered why this place was called New Harmony. It may have been because there was an older place of worship called Harmony, or it may be that the name was suggested by the fact, that two distinct denominations agreed to worship together in the same house. This may have suggested the idea in those days of fifty years ago when there was so much denominational strife of a strange mixture of things.

Perhaps it was thought to be something new under the sun, for Baptists and Presbyterians to dwell together in harmony. Therefore, a new kind of harmony suggested the name. But this is not to be considered strange; for harmony characterizes all Christian associations, no matter by what name they are called; all believers are in harmony with God, through his word, the truth as it is in Jesus. The closer and sweeter their fellowship with Christ, the more harmonious their intercourse and association with one another. Here for fifty years, two Christian congregations of different names have been worshipping in the same house, both bearing testimony to the same great cardinal truths of the Christian faith. It seems to us something beautiful, that the light of God's truth has been reflected here for a half century by those differently constructed lamps, yet they filled them from the same

cruise of oil, supplied by the good Master of the house, and though they adjusted the wicks, and trimmed them after a different fashion yet they lighted their lamp at the same fire, and on the same altar, and went out into the darkness round about, each bearing his own lamp. There was emitted from each the same kind of light and as you beheld the illumination of each lamp as borne hither and thither, you could not tell whether it was a baptist or a presbyterian lamp.

Such is the light of heaven as borne in earthen vessels, by the different denominations of Christians. Each has his own way of doing things, yet they all reflect the same light, not their own but the light of heaven. This light is being borne by Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and others into the dark benighted places of earth and the aggregate result, is one and the same thing and you cannot tell which denomination did it, because it is all the light of the Sun of righteousness scattered over the earth by different reflectors and thus the reflection will go on, by divine arrangement until, „the beams that shine on Zion’s hill shall lighten every land. The King who reigns in Zion’s towers shall all the world command, O that from Zion now might shine this heavenly light, this truth divine; Till the whole universe shall be, But one great Temple, Lord for thee.” Your church here is one of the reflectors of this heavenly light and the thing of interest to you to day is that this light has been shining, here, for half a century and as you commemorate this fact to day, associations that cluster around this spot, hallowed in your memory, by the benign influences, which have in the years gone by, been brought to bear through the medium of the church upon you and your children, your neighbors, your fathers and mothers, back for generations, and you desire to day in gratitude to the giver of all good, to give expression, for the kind

heavenly beneficence, of which you have been made the recipient, through this church. And for the manifold ways in which the blessings of heaven have descended to you, through your beloved Zion, you can not find sufficient thankful utterance, you may try to recall the indirect or rather the reflected influence for good upon the entire neighborhood or community, your church has sent out. Light, not of earth, but a heavenly light, has been shining in this vicinity for fifty years. The support of this light that which held it up, so that it might be seen and its rays reach out and pierce the darkness of every nook and corner, of the region round about is not the house, the material edifice, nor the ground on which it stands, though these may be hallowed by sacred and delightful associations. But that which, bears up this heavenly light and reflects it abroad, is the ordinance of grace, administered here and the true believers who worship within these consecrated walls. Here by covenant engagement that light came to be the light of the world. The Sun of righteousness shines with a direct heavenly effulgence by means of the ministration of the word, and other ordinances appropriate to the Lord's house. Here the faces of the worshippers are lightened and made to shine like that of Moses, when he came down from the Mount and they go out to their homes and into the community mixing with the people, reflecting from their countenances, the light, that beamed directly upon them in the Sanctuary, and bringing under its influence, those with whom they associate. Thus it is, that the genuine disciple like the blessed Master is ever going about doing good. Wherever the christian goes if he go in the name and spirit of a disciple he lets his light shine, by reflecting upon those who come within the sphere of his influence, the light of the cross. The path of such an one is as a shining light. Who can tell what a blessing to this community,

the good people of New Harmony have been by that unconscious, influence for good upon those among whom they live, reflected by their daily walk and conversation. O how guarded and circumspect christians ought to be as to how they live. Your life my brother, either lightens or darkens the pathway of others. You can not live unto yourself, you either sweeten or embitter the life of those under your influence, you can do them good by letting your light, as a christian shine. We know, that this community, has been greatly blessed, by the indirect influences emanating from the godly lives of the members of this church. How many who have been held under religious checks and restraints, and have grown to be useful men, good citizens and neighbors even in a temporal view, apart from the direct spiritual influences because of the religious environment thrown around them by the church at New Harmony. How much of that which contributes to the enjoyment in your homes, beautified and made your walks of life pleasant; your social status, what it is, lovely and attractive, is due to those gracious and heavenly influences which have been steadily, silently but deeply impressed upon the hearts of the people of New Harmony, during the bygone years, through the medium of the church. This happy, community is harmonious because God purposed to bless you, by planting his church here. But that which lead you chiefly to the appointment of this service to day is your affectionate attachment to your church. You love the place. If you were asked why you love New Harmony there are so many reasons why, and you have had so many experiences here of what God is to you, what he has done for you, that your attachment to the church has become habitual, so that you would scarcely be able to say why you loved New Harmony. Like the little girl who never knew any better than to love her mother, when asked

why she loved mother said, why because I do love her. You have had experiences, here which are known only to yourself, and your God. Here your soul has been fed on the hidden manna as it was handed down to you from heaven, and by that spiritual nourishment which God has prepared specially for his people. Your religious life has been developed and strengthened, your faith has grown stronger your repentance deepened and you have felt the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit, and thus you have been prepared for the duties and trials of life.

Here too when the troubles of your heart were enlarged, you have heard the voice saying to you, "Let not your heart be troubled", and you were made to feel something of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away. Here too when your faith was faint and had almost lost its grasp upon unseen realities, and you felt that you were about to sink and when you cried for help you saw Him who has ever been your help coming to you over the dark waters and saying to you: Be not afraid, only believe. Here you come to bury your dead, with a heart overwhelmed with grief because of the decease of the loved one. All was dark, there was nothing now left you in the world for which you cared to live, and in your deep despairing grief, that greatest of all friends to you by tender, sympathetic, comforting words dispelled the gloom of the grave and illumined your presence with heavenly light as he said to you, thy father, thy mother, thy wife, thy husband, thy brother, thy sister, thy child shall rise again. I am the resurrection, whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Here too when your feeling had been hurt by some unkind word or deed and you began to feel a vindictive feeling entering in your heart, then through the word and in it you learned to forgive. Here too, when your spirit had become tired

and faint under the burdens of life, you felt the load taken away as you heard Him, who is touched with the feeling of your impurities say—Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and find rest for your souls. Here too you have had sweet anticipations of the heavenly rest as the preacher spoke of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. While through this barren wilderness we roam, how sweet to cast a look above and think we are going home to him; that there our pilgrimage shall cease and every wave of earthly woe be hushed to heavenly peace. Home sweet home, O for that land of rest above, our own eternal home, where happier bowers than Eden bloom, Blessed rest! through stormy scenes we onward press to you. Here too in this sanctuary as you felt your love to God in Christ grow stronger, you were conscious of an increasing affection for your brethren, and as you sat with them at the communion table, you felt that you and they were one, one brotherhood in Christ. “We are but several parts of the same broken bread.” One body hath its several limbs, but Jesus is the head. Time would fail us to tell of the blessed experiences, you have felt here in your earthly sanctuary and you feel here to-day that the greatest of all your enjoyments and comforts are those which have come to you through your church; you cannot but love her for what she has been to you and those you love, and as memory carries you back to-day along the ancestral line, with which you are connected, many a precious name of those who were wont to occupy these pews come to mind, they are not with us they have passed from the church militant into the church in glory. We have written their names on their tombs, and embalmed their memory with all our hearts can give. One cannot refrain from mentioning our beloved class mate in the school of the prophets W. R. Stedman. Soon after he was licensed to preach the gospel, he entered the

army of the southern confederacy and acted as chaplain in the S. C. Battalion. The testimony of the major of the Battallion, is that man never stood more faithful to the post of duty throughout the sanguinary struggle than he. He won the warmest regards and esteem of the major, though himself an ungodly man. He attributed much of the orderly gentlemanly deportment of the soldiers under his command to the christian influence and preaching of Mr. Stoddard. We loved him for his many virtues. Wherever he went his godly life was recognized and felt throughout, yet we feel assured that in his crown are many stars of rejoicing. Soon after the close of the war he came from his post in the west on a visit to the parental home accompanied with his young bride. A fatal disease was pressing upon him when he reached his fathers house, the house that expected to be one of rejoicing, by the bridal visit was by the death of the son made one of mourning. He died in the prime of young manhood, he had embodied in his christian character the qualities that augured much usefulness in the church.

Lord how mysterious are Thy ways,
How blind are we, How mean our praise.
Thy steps no mortal eyes explore.
Tis ours to wonder and adore.

He was a son of this church. With a large concourse of weeping friends we gently and reverently laid his remains in a tomb to rest in the cemetery connected with this church. Since his death father and mother and many of his kindred have passed over the river and are with him on the other side. The roll of the dead connected with this church we suppose now in the course of fifty years is longer than that of the living. How many of the Stewarts, the Stoddards, the Gillilands, the Henrys, the Templetons, the Owens and many others whose names we cannot now recall are on the roll of the dead, yet they live and still contribute to the moral

power of New Harmony. We do not believe in the intercession of the Saints, but the quickening influences which their christian life exerted while they were in the flesh still exist unconsciously shaping and moulding the character of the living. The influence of a good word, a good deed, a good life never dies. Such is the web or scheme of the sensitive nature that binds human heart into sympathetic association, that an impulse that awakens an emotion in one is transmitted to others and thus the influence goes on reaching and moving hearts, long after the author of the original impulse has passed away. Like the wavelet produced by casting a stone into a lake, the influence keeps widening and extending until the very shores of the lake are reached. So impulses started by the sainted dead, while in the church militant, are still in some shape impressing the hearts and lives of men. Their precepts and example are still with us in memory. They are still members of the same church of God to which we belong; they having once occupied these benches and communed with us here where the same blessed gospel filled their souls with the same hopes and aspirations, that now move us, makes them still very near and dear to us. The very nature of the services to-day brings us into a kind of association or communion with the deceased members of this church. We are only divided by the narrow stream of death. They over there are in the christians home, in glory. They on this side, if what they profess to be, are in the christian's home in grace on earth; there is a continual passing from this home to the other; it won't be long till the last one of the living members, of New Harmony shall have passed over, where all the faithful of this christian communion will be together in the heavenly communion; where there will be no more anniversaries or centenials, no marking or recording the events of fleeting years, but where in our Fathers

house, immortal bloom will characterize each inhabitant.

When in the city of our God,
Shall we thy courts ascend,
Where congregations ne'r break up,
And sabbaths have no end.



